

BEING AND OPENNESS TO NOVELTY;  
NON-BEING AND EVENTUAL ENTROPY.

A professional project  
Submitted to the faculty of the  
School of Theology at Claremont  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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*This professional project, completed by*

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*has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty  
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Thanks to Phyllis Clark for typing this manuscript. Her abilities were only outdone by her graciousness.

This project is dedicated to my dear sister, Tylenne, and to my loving wife, Cindy. Both of them bring me great joy.

But a man can decide against his past habits and against social pressures, not simply as rebellion against them, but as responding to the claim of truth of the neighbor, or of some ideal possibility. Then life means growth, freshness, and intensification.

John B. Cobb, Jr., God and the World (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 49.

Thus, growth is often painful and anxiety-arousing as well as joyful and energizing. It hurts to let go of something, however constricting, that has at least made us feel protected. Growth involves risking. It requires the "leap of trust".

Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., Growth Counseling For Marriage Enrichment (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 7.

Where there is daring and courage, there is the possibility of failure. And in every act of faith this possibility is present. The risk must be taken.

Paul Tillich, Dynamics of Faith (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1957), p. 17.

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## ABSTRACT

This project deals with the human predicament of existential anxiety. Existential anxiety is the fear we all have that we may cease to exist at some time in the future, no matter how much we are able to accomplish in the meantime. Existential anxiety is caused by the tension of our trying to live in two realities. In one, we observe the world, but do not get involved in the process going on. We watch the world as a spectator. In the other, we get involved in the process. We do not observe the world, because we are too busy being a part of it. We are no longer spectators, but participants. Tension occurs when we cannot make up our mind in which reality we want to participate. Existential anxiety is the result.

Existential anxiety, in and of itself, is not evil. It is the precondition of both creativity and sin. It is possible therefore, to respond both negatively and positively to existential anxiety. If we respond positively, we discover that life is good. But in the process we must be open to the world, the challenges, opportunities and difficulties it presents to us. This means that we are open to novelty and respond positively to God's call or lure. In this process we make the most of our moments and thereby experience Being. Peak experiences are the best part of this process.

But we can also respond to existential anxiety by experiencing Non-Being. This means that we do not wish to be either the spectator or the participant. We would rather be closed to the world and the



challenges and opportunities it presents to us. It also means that we close ourselves off from novelty and God's call or lure. And we can no longer make the most of the moment because something else has become more important to us. This can only lead to entropy as we continue to close ourselves off to novelty and block God's call through our pride, idolatry, sloth, etc.

The way to respond positively to existential anxiety is to make the most of whatever novelty -- painful or joyful -- that is presented to us. Process theism demonstrates to us on an intellectual level why we should do this. I have given some examples on how to accomplish this. It is up to each of us, however, to take the giant leap of faith and risk everything we are for what we might be. God calls us to do this in each and every moment.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This project focuses on the human predicament of existential anxiety, and more specifically on how humans respond to it. It utilizes Kierkegaard, May, Niebuhr, Tillich, and Clinebell to describe what existential anxiety is and how it affect us. It then uses Barth's concept of sloth, Tillich's concept of idolatry, and Niebuhr's concept of pride to show ways of responding negatively to it. It argues that these ways are entropic. Responding positively to existential anxiety can include having process theism as a system of faith to assist one in taking the risk necessary to overcome it. By using this system of faith, one is more likely to be able to take the leap of faith required to overcome existential anxiety. This system is one that I have used and found helpful. I feel others who desire to overcome their existential anxiety can do the same.

I believe anyone interested in human behavior would find this project interesting. Psychologists, politicians, nurses -- people in many different professions -- would find the concepts presented here relevant in their interactions with people. This project would be most useful, however, to clergypersons who want to understand our human predicament and do something positive about it.

Concepts in this project can easily be adapted as background material for teaching Christian education classes, for preaching, for leading small groups, or for other things. In the classroom, one can

enable children and adults to get in touch with existential anxiety and help them overcome it. This would primarily entail teaching them to be open to novelty. The Old Testament contains many stories of this nature, e.g. Moses in the desert, Abraham sacrificing Isaac, and even Jonah. Christ taught that we should be open to God, e.g. because we cannot serve both mammon and God. In preaching one can describe the folly of not being open to God's ways, and then use examples of people who have been able to make the most of the novelty God has given us; especially Christ. In small groups one can enable individuals to overcome their existential anxiety with shared dialogue and relevant reading material.

This project does not discuss the origins of existential anxiety -- though I believe it has to do with original sin (knowledge that we cannot do everything we want to). It also does not discuss group existential anxiety, but limits itself to individual existential anxiety. I do not recommend that the material covered here be shared with just anyone or any group, because the topic of existential anxiety often arouses our own; and unless one is both willing and able to help others overcome it, the topic should not be deeply penetrated. I would like to see a future project develop a Christian education strategy based on the concepts presented here.

The problem I am dealing with is that we are all bound to existential anxiety, and even though existential anxiety is not evil, we cannot always respond positively to it. Most of us respond negatively, and these responses often do us harm. For example, we worship success and end up like Howard Hughes. What is needed is a road that leads out

of the grip of existential anxiety. I believe process theism gives us good reasons to make the effort that is required. I have also given some examples of ways that we can go about getting ourselves out of its grip. Ultimately the leap of faith, or risk, must be made by ourselves; but I have given some guidelines that I feel will greatly assist the individual.

This project contains certain key terms which are not found elsewhere, and they need to be fully understood. "Becoming" means participating in a reality that is objective. The world is analyzed from this perspective. "Being" means participating in a reality that is subjective. Here, we go further than analysis, and interact in the world with our emotions and feelings. Non-Being is pseudo-being. It entails trying to relive a past experience of Being in the present, when we should be moving from Becoming to authentic Being. Entropy, a predictable state of affairs, is the state we end up in when we experience Non-Being long or strong enough. Openness to novelty, that which has never occurred before, entails escaping Non-Being and eventual entropy: in this way Being is experienced. Experiencing Becoming would only get us half way there and is therefore not the best we should do. My thesis is that the best life entails being open to novelty and experiencing Being as much as possible.

What I am saying in this project is partly original. Scholars have written on the subject of existential anxiety, and some have stressed its importance. But I have gone further than anything I have read and have given the reason for the occurrence of existential anxiety. I have suggested that responding negatively to it (through our pride,

idolatry and sloth), entails drifting toward entropy. This means that whenever we do not respond positively to inevitable existential anxiety, and thereby fail to incorporate novelty, we must, according to natural laws, close ourselves off from it, and drift toward entropy. Entropy is what hell is like. For me, the entire theme of human life is incorporating novelty, or closing one's self to it. Even though some people will say I am making too much of a small thing, that life is more complex than just incorporating or not incorporating novelty, I personally cannot think of a more inclusive subject.

I will first introduce the concept of existential anxiety and show its centrality to our lives. I will then describe the negative response and its consequences. But I also show how to respond positively. By the end of this project one should not only have a firm grasp of what existential anxiety is, what produces it, and how people respond negatively to it; but also how to overcome it by using process theism and certain methods that I describe.

## CHAPTER 2

### OUR PREDICAMENT

#### A. EXISTENTIAL ANXIETY

##### 1. Various Viewpoints By Scholars

I want to describe what existential anxiety is. But in doing so, I don't want to rely solely on my own observations; so I am going to describe existential anxiety from the viewpoint of various scholars. I hope that I do each of them justice.

Søren Kierkegaard had four books published in the space of ten days in June of 1844. One of these books, The Concept of Dread, deals with existential anxiety. For the reader of the English translation, this is a difficult book. But I will try to explain Kierkegaard's views.

We have no adequate English translation for the word Angst. The word dread is used, yet that is only a compromise. The word dread means to fear greatly, or better, to anticipate with fear. Kierkegaard's view of Angst, however, is better defined as: apprehension of the future, or even fighting against the future.<sup>1</sup> If we combine the two definitions, we come up with something like: to anticipate the future with apprehension or fear.

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<sup>1</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Dread (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. x.

But Kierkegaard does give us a little more to go on. In one place he uses "the possibility of freedom" to explain the state of dread.<sup>2</sup> In another place he describes how in dread there is the egoistic infinity of possibility, which does not tempt like a definite choice but (rather) alarms and fascinates with its sweet anxiety.<sup>3</sup> The object of dread starts with nothing, but becomes more and more a something.<sup>4</sup>

Kierkegaard gives us a brief example of what dread (existential anxiety) amounts to. He describes how an Indian hermit who for two years lived upon dew, came once to the city, tasted wine, and then became addicted to drink.<sup>5</sup> Those who feel that they too might possibly come upon a similar fate experience dread. Those who are confident no such thing could happen to them experience no dread. A good way to summarize his thoughts is to say that for him existential anxiety meant the fear of the future and what it might do to us.

Kierkegaard was the first modern scholar to write about existential anxiety, and the other scholars I am going to write about have borrowed ideas from him.

Rollo May's book, The Meaning of Anxiety, was published in 1950. May's work was heavily influenced not only by Kierkegaard, but also by Freud and Tillich. He even quotes the first two at the beginning of

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 55

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

the first page in his book as sort of a prescript.

May's definition of existential anxiety is: "the apprehension  
 cued off by a threat to some value which the individual holds essential  
 to his existence as a personality".<sup>6</sup> He goes on to state that the threat  
 may be to physical or psychological life (e.g. death, loss of freedom),  
 or it may be to some other value which individuals identify with their  
 existence (e.g. success, the love of another person, etc.).<sup>7</sup> So, it is  
 an apprehension of something which threatens some form of our perceived  
 existence. As an example, May describes a man who might lose his job.  
 He is very anxious about losing his job, because if he does he would  
 just as soon "jump off the end of the dock" as receive government re-  
 lief.<sup>8</sup> (May also describes a woman who feels there would be no reason  
 to live if her fiancée ever stopped loving her.)<sup>9</sup> From May's point of  
 view, then, existential anxiety occurs when we are anxious about what  
 we perceive as a threat to some part of our existence, e.g. losing a  
 job or fiancé(e). It should also be noted that this threat can be  
 either real or imagined -- it still has the same effect.

Reinhold Niebuhr in his book, The Nature and Destiny of Man,  
 is more clear than either Kierkegaard or May. Anxiety for Niebuhr

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<sup>6</sup>Rollo May, The Meaning of Anxiety (New York: Norton, 1977),  
 p. 191.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.



is "the internal description of the state of temptation",<sup>10</sup> or "anxiety is the inevitable concomitant of the paradox of freedom and finiteness in which man is involved".<sup>11</sup> In other words, we humans are finite creatures with infinite imaginations; i.e. we can only live so long, yet we can still think of ourselves as being God and doing whatever we want for as long as we want. As a result human ambition is always partly prompted by the fear of meaninglessness which threatens by reason of the contingent character of human existence.<sup>12,13</sup>

From Niebuhr's viewpoint a man applying for a new job might be anxious because he knows he may not get the job because he does not have all the qualifications. He is finite, e.g. he does not know all there is to know in his field. Another example is a woman might not apply to dental school because most of the successful dentists are males and she does not want to take the chance and become educated, only to be disappointed when trying to make it in the business world.

The problem, in short, is that we humans cannot do or become anything we want because of our finite natures; yet we can imagine ourselves doing so because our imaginations are not bound by these limitations. According to Niebuhr then, anxiety is the result of this paradox of freedom and finiteness.

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<sup>10</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), I, 182.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., I, 185.

<sup>13</sup> It might be important to note at this time that many scholars proclaim that before the Fall in the Garden of Eden, there was no anxiety; see Luther or Kierkegaard.

Paul Tillich wrote a book in 1952 which is concerned with anxiety and its conquest. It is called The Courage To Be. In it he says that "anxiety is the state in which a being is aware of its possible nonbeing".<sup>14</sup> Or, anxiety is the existential awareness of non-being.<sup>15</sup> Or again, anxiety is finitude, experienced as one's own finitude.<sup>16</sup> Nonbeing for Tillich is the negation of every concept,<sup>17,18</sup> or, in my words: the taking away of everything we can conceive. The object of anxiety is therefore the negation of every object.<sup>19</sup> But it is important to realize that the only object of anxiety is the threat itself, not the source of the threat, because the source of the threat is "nothingness".<sup>20</sup> (I would call this nothingness the absolute state of entropy.)

Tillich goes on to say that the anxiety of a finite being about the threat of nonbeing cannot be eliminated because it belongs

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<sup>14</sup>Paul Tillich, The Courage To Be (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), p. 35.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>18</sup>Non-Being -- my term -- and nonbeing -- Tillich's -- are similar terms, but not exactly the same. Non-Being, for example, is a state of existence that humans find themselves in, e.g. alcoholism. Nonbeing, on the other hand, entails nothingness. Both are states, however, where entropy would be working at its maximum.

<sup>19</sup>Tillich, p. 36.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

to existence itself.<sup>21</sup> This anxiety takes three forms; the anxiety of death, the anxiety of meaninglessness, and the anxiety of condemnation.<sup>22</sup>

Tillich also describes another type of anxiety that merits attention: neurotic anxiety. Neurotic anxiety is pathological in nature, and is therefore completely different from existential anxiety, which is normal anxiety. Existential anxiety, the anxiety of a finite being about the threat of nonbeing, cannot be eliminated because it belongs to existence itself<sup>23</sup>-- it is natural that we are anxious about death. But neurotic anxiety is something different. Neurotic anxiety "is the awareness of unsolved conflicts between structural elements of the personality, as for instance conflicts between unconscious drives and repressive norms...between imaginary worlds and the experience of the real world, between trends toward greatness and perfection and the experience of one's smallness and imperfection..."<sup>24</sup> Neurotics have an unrealistic self-affirmation<sup>25</sup> "which must be healed by being taken into a courage to be which is extensive as well as intensive".<sup>26</sup> Neurotic anxiety is thus not normal anxiety. Its appearance thus requires the attention of a trained counselor to help eliminate the "unsolved

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp 64-65.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

conflicts". It is not to be confused with existential anxiety, which is normal and which no human can escape. In conclusion, Tillich feels that existential anxiety is the awareness that something may cease to exist -- especially ourselves.

Howard Clinebell once wrote that "anxiety is the response to anything that we perceive as a fundamental threat to our well-being".<sup>27</sup> He goes on to say that existential anxiety is normal anxiety that stems from our human self-awareness of the knowledge that we will someday die. This is just part of our human nature.<sup>28</sup>

Next I will provide an image of existential anxiety.

## 2. An Image of Existential Anxiety

Picture in your mind a man, blindfolded, going down a raging river in a small raft. This man has been on this raft for a week. The way he got to this raft was from jumping blindfolded from another raft where he had been for a month. On his old raft he had all the water he could drink. This was barely sufficient to keep him alive, yet because he had never experienced anything else he thought that things were pretty good. But after three weeks on his old raft he had a vision one night that there were other rafts in this river and that if he managed to jump to another one he would be able to experience better things. From this time on his old raft just did not seem to be enough because somehow he felt unfulfilled. He felt that there was something lacking and he was

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<sup>27</sup>Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., Growth Counseling (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), p. 110.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

aware of two things: something was missing in his life that he wanted to reach out for, and that he was afraid because he did not want to give up what he did have because he might not have anything else to replace it. He was thus anxious to reach out to what his intuition told him would be filled with fuller experiences, but he was also anxious because his senses told him he might not be able to experience anything at all if he gave up what he did have.

It took this man almost a week to get up the courage to jump from one raft to another. There were several reasons for this. One was that he was blindfolded and couldn't see another raft even if it was right in front of his face. Another problem was that he knew he was going downstream in a raft and it would be hard to time the jump even if he could see. The stream was also a raging river and it was hard at times just to stand up, much less think about jumping to another moving raft. Another problem was that even though he felt that the next raft would allow him fuller experiences in life, he was pretty happy just living on water. And this water had become important to him. Since that is all he had, he spent a lot of time thinking about it and making a big deal of it. And since he did not know what the new raft would have in store for him he asked himself why should he make the jump. His senses told him that he would fall into the raging river and be lost forever. But his intuition told him that something better was out there, and that his vision was not completely false.

Finally he did jump! He gathered all his courage and hurled himself into the abyss. Just when he felt the water cooling his face as his body fell toward the river, he landed in another raft. A quick

inventory of this raft showed that there was not only all the water he could drink, but also soda crackers and crunchy peanut butter.

So here is the man in his new raft still blindfolded going down the same raging river. But he has new experiences: soda crackers and peanut butter. Part of him is very happy and content because his new raft is so much better than the old one. But part of him is discontented because deep inside his subconscious his intuition is telling him that the next raft has got to be even better than the present one. But he will wait until God fills him with another vision before he will even begin to consciously wrestle with the question as to what the next raft might hold and how he is going to get the courage to make that jump.

Existential anxiety is thus very real for us. We have to cope with it, or run away from it, because it will always confront us. Next I will describe where it is that it exists.

## B. OBJECTIVE VERSUS SUBJECTIVE REALITY

For me to say that there are two types of reality may sound absurd. Reality is what we make it, a person with common sense would say -- and I would agree. But there are also, in my opinion, two frames of reference with which we view our reality. One is that in which we analyze what is going on in the world around us. We bump into an old friend, for example, and contemplate what that person has been up to lately. We have a meal set before us at a restaurant and wonder what kind of grill they used to cook the steak. Or, we discover that some

one loves us, and we wonder why. This is what I call objective reality, that which is cultivated and procured through analysis and observation.

Another frame of reference for viewing reality is participatory. We bump into the same old friend, for example, and now we are aware only of our feelings about not seeing that person for some time. Or we get our steak and savor the smell of the grill left on the steak and enjoy the smells of the rest of the meal. And when we discover that someone loves us, we do not analyze it and wonder why, but we enjoy it and savor each and every moment.<sup>29</sup>

It is true that we cannot enjoy anything if we only analyze it and never get around to participating in it. However, we also need to be able to do some analysis or we will not pick the best, or most enjoyable things to participate in.

So, there are two ways of looking at and participating in the world: objectively and subjectively. One is analyzing reality -- one is participating in reality. It should be noted that these terms are mutually exclusive from a subjective frame of reference, but seem to overlap from an objective viewpoint.<sup>30</sup>

### 1. Objective Reality -- An Ongoing Process Called Becoming

Objective Reality is easily measured because it normally consists of past, present, and future. We always base our observations of

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<sup>29</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Works of Love (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1962), pp 26-27.

<sup>30</sup>I suppose I am describing right brain, left brain activity.

present reality on experiences that we have had in the past and on predictions of what the future will be like. In other words, we look backward, forward, and then analyze the present in light of what we see.

Objective reality is thus an ongoing process because it consists of past, present, and future. What is seen then in the perspective of objective reality is a continuing process of becoming.

From this viewpoint the fact that it is raining outside has meaning only if we see the rain as having started early this morning, still continuing now, and expected to stop by tomorrow afternoon. The rain thus has a beginning (past), a present, and a future ending. It is Becoming because it has a starting point and an ending point -- and most importantly, for objective reality, this can easily be measured. It exists over a period of time that can readily be analyzed. It can also be looked at objectively. Almost anyone would agree for instance when the rain started, acknowledge that it is continuing and that the weather forecast is that it will stop by tomorrow afternoon.

When utilizing objective reality we thus observe that something has a past, present, and future that can be objectively analyzed. It exists in time -- measureably so.

And just as the rain can be analyzed as Becoming (into being and out of it), so can almost anything else -- love, the meeting of an old friend, or even the way a steak was cooked. They can all be observed as coming into being and then leaving it -- Becoming.



## 2. Subjective Reality -- Full Participation In the Here and Now Called Being

Subjective reality cannot be measured -- it simply occurs. Subjective reality consists solely of what exists in the present moment. Our experiences of the past and our projections of the future still affect us, but not in the same way as in objective reality. What really counts here is the present moment. When I look outside at the rain from the viewpoint of subjective reality, for instance, I am only conscious of the rain coming down out of the sky and pounding on the cars passing by on the highway. Nothing else captures my attention. There is only the rain coming down hitting the cars as they go by on the highway.

The only other awareness in my mind is a shudder of cold on my ears and hands as this morning's experience of getting wet in the same rain comes in on me. But the question of when the rain started is absurd. The time of its ending is knowledge to be tucked away for future use. It does not have any special significance -- it is just a fact.

The only thing that is important is full participation in the here and now. Again, the rain is coming down and pounding on the cars as they go by. I feel a little colder looking at this as I have my experience of getting wet a little earlier pushed into my consciousness. But there is nothing else in the world that matters as much as participating in this. It would be unfair to ask for more, and it is only right that the participation should be full.

Participating totally in the here and now has a timeless quality about it<sup>31</sup> -- for what more is there? Reality, seen subjectively, is only what we are currently experiencing. It is what I call Being because it is committing oneself totally to the act of experiencing solely the here and now. And when we participate in it we become part of it, and we obtain a state of Being that lasts as long as the individual experience lasts. And experiences do not ever stop -- that is the one thing we can be sure of.<sup>32</sup>

Experiences shape us as we allow ourselves to be influenced by them. We can do that best by full participation in the here and now, and that always means experiencing Being, of becoming a part of that which we are experiencing.

I am talking about subjective reality, that piece of the infinite which is itself infinite because it is all that we know and experience. It is that speck of today (right now) which has meaning for all time, because it is all the time that one is experiencing. And it takes full participation -- Being. And by Being, I mean total involvement. The only thing that is worth being involved in is the here and now. And the here and now demands full participation; because there is no other now, nor will there ever be.

There is another way to look at this on a deeper level. Suppose I see a colorful rainbow nearby. I notice its colors, but not

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<sup>31</sup>Even though this may only occur during peak experiences.

<sup>32</sup>That is also the one thing we need to appreciate.

much more, because I just remembered that there is supposed to be a pot of gold at the end of every rainbow. And because the rainbow is so close I decide that I will try to find it. So I stop enjoying the rainbow, and instead set off on the goal to find the pot of gold. Now I am no longer able to enjoy the rainbow because I have a more important goal which I feel will make me happier at some point in the future.

My goal is thus to find the pot of gold; and I don't really care about the colorful rainbow anymore, except that it is my road to another goal. The beauty of the rainbow is lost to me as I have a more important goal in mind. After a futile search I would discover no pot of gold and that the rainbow has disappeared. What I can do is search for another rainbow so that I can follow it until I find a pot of gold. This would then be my goal, and I would feel that it would bring me happiness.

But what if I decide to be goalless? What if I decide I am not going to chase rainbows? What if I just sit there and enjoy the rainbow as it is? I can then, and only then, participate in Being and enjoy the rainbow. I can also discover that the real pot of gold is in enjoying the rainbow as it is, and not in chasing false illusions that tell me I have to have something I don't have in order to make me happy.

### 3. The Tension Between The Two

Those who have not thought much about observable reality and participatory reality will not have had the chance to contemplate any tension between the two. But there can be no greater tension for a

human being to experience. Human beings are the only creatures who can really participate in objective reality.

Tension comes when we try participating in one of two realities. And so we ask ourselves, "Do I allow myself to participate in the here and now, or do I contemplate what is going on? Do I enjoy the rain and the feelings that it stirs in me, or do I think about the probability of it stopping tomorrow afternoon as predicted?" The tension occurs because we have two realities which are often mutually exclusive.

There are times when we carry analysis farther than is required, necessary, or even beneficial. Take for example a young man who has just entered high school. This young man played baseball in junior high and is thinking about playing on the high school team. His parents are applying pressure for him to make the team, and are hoping that he will someday play professional baseball like his Uncle Jack. The student is very much aware of the pressure his parents are applying. But he finds himself constantly asking if he will ever be any good at baseball. He has this nagging feeling that he is just wasting his time because he will never be as good as his Uncle Jack.

He has looked at the high school baseball team play, and he is convinced that he is far below their standards. He has also noticed that two of his peers were asked to play, and that they seem to be doing well. So he does not even try out his first year, but watches the team play. He has lots of anxiety, however: "Should I try out for the team next year, and if so how much should I practice in the meantime? My parents want me to so badly!" Everytime he thinks about his predicament he feels bad. He loses his appetite when he watches the

professionals on television. His father gets tickets to the World Series and he cannot sleep thinking about being there. Uncle Jack got the tickets and is counting on them to be there. In just a short while this student is unable to concentrate during practice with his father. He cannot commit himself psychologically to "being" a baseball player. But he can no longer analyze his chances for making the grade because he needs to "participate" if he is ever going to be any good. He needs to play, but he is still analyzing the situation, i.e. "Am I ever going to be any good, my parents want me to, Uncle Jack is family, I can't let them all down." And he cannot analyze and play at the same time. The result is tension that produces existential anxiety. He becomes afraid that if he attempts to become a professional baseball player he will fail in the process and then will feel as if he does not exist. His senses ask him if he doesn't make it, what then?

When he finally breaks a finger in practice with his father I am not a bit surprised. His parents, however, are shocked at this setback. The student has not relaxed so much in a long time, and for the time being he can "participate" in reality and enjoy it. The tension is no longer there and he is free for the time being.

But the question still nags his unconscious: "Will I ever be a good baseball player, and if so how do I get there?" He may just decide that it is not worth the effort -- he's not going to be any good anyway. But he may take the gamble, practice often and then do the best that he can when it comes to the tryouts. He may have the attitude, "I can only do the best I can, and I'm not responsible for anything past that."

But he may also feel that his best will never be good enough. He is trapped between objective and subjective reality and the existential anxiety that he may cease to exist as he is if he makes the attempt to become something he never can be. There is no relief and the broken finger was but a sip of water in his desert of tension and existential anxiety.

This sort of tension, existential anxiety, happens to all of us. Should I marry so and so, get this particular job, spend my money a certain way, are all questions which increase it. Few human beings are free from existential anxiety. But some relief can be found. My point so far is that existential anxiety does exist. It is out there and it is in us.

#### 4. Non-Being and Eventual Entropy

The opposite of Being is Non-Being. Being entails participating fully in the here and now. Non-Being is pseudo-being. It entails not being able to participate in the here and now because one is concerned about something else which is more important than the here and now. One hopes to trade the present moment for an enjoyable moment (in which Being was experienced) in the past. Idols, our pride, our slothfulness, etc., all offer us this possibility.

For example, when alcoholics attempt to live in a state of Non-Being -- being in a state of drunkenness to the extent that they are oblivious to time -- they do not care about the past, the present, or the future. They only want to be drunk enough to forget that these states of time exist. People who only care about their pride also fall

into the same category because they do not care about the present moment. They care only about keeping what is so important to them intact, e.g. that their theories will never be refuted, etc.<sup>33</sup>

What happens, however, when we become oblivious to the present is that we exclude all novelty. But when we exclude novelty, we drift toward entropy. Whenever we fail to participate in the here and now we drift toward entropy, because there is nothing new coming into our lives to change them -- and that is hell. For example, picture in your mind something that you really enjoy doing. Now imagine yourself doing only this one thing for the next million years. It would get pretty boring. But now imagine yourself doing different things for the same

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<sup>33</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr describes other types of pride which also fall into this category. But I have centered on this one because I use it in Chapter Four. Sensuality, which Niebuhr describes, also falls into this category -- maybe more so. See Niebuhr, I, 228-240. Notice that Niebuhr describes this type of sensuality as Sin, and that even though I never make the correlation between Sin and entropy, there is no doubt that the more entropic something is, the more sinful it is simply because it has closed itself off to novelty; and thus to God and change. The reasoning behind my logic is that if something is entropic it has consciously decided that it will not be open to God's novelty, but will rather attempt to stay the same; and by doing so it says "No" to God and "Yes" to its own desires and wishes to have things its own way. This desire to have things its own way -- i.e. to not change -- and not to be open to what God gives it is the root of all evil. We have two relevant examples. One is Christ who was open to God's novelty more than any other living being, and who forged his own will to correlate with God's. He did not want to be crucified, for example, but because God desired it, he went along with it. We also have Satan. He simply wants more power than has been allotted to him so he rebels and takes things into his own system of power. Christ was open to God, Satan was closed. Christ was also able to make the most of each and every moment. I think that Satan is closed off to time -- and the moments within it -- because Satan is so preoccupied with the accumulation of power. This is an example of Non-Being, while Christ even had time for children, dinners, and turning water into wine -- the small things which entail experiencing Being.

million years, and let some of those things be things that you cannot describe but can only anticipate with curiosity and wonder. The former is very boring, entropic, and close to what hell is probably like. The latter is much more interesting and worth living for.

Who would not agree that an alcoholic living on skid row is living in hell? And if we truly believe that airplanes don't fly and that the world is flat, aren't we missing important facts too? By closing our minds to the truth we limit the enjoyment that we can have, and if we spend too much energy protecting the lie we will drift, eventually, toward entropy, because we will not allow anything new in. Refusing the truth always pushes us toward entropy. But by accepting and being open to the truth we can be free. As was once said: You will know the truth and the truth will set you free (John 8:32). Isn't this really being open to God's novelty?

What I have shown so far is that existential anxiety exists. I have also given my own image of it. I have described two types of reality we all live in, because it is the tension of our living in between them that produces existential anxiety. Objective reality (Becoming) allows us to analyze the world. If that is all we ever did we would be robots who sorted data, but felt nothing. No human can do this. In subjective reality (Being) we "feel" reality. If that is all we ever did we would be aimless creatures who thrived on sensuality. No one can accomplish this either. Both objective and subjective reality are needed in the proper proportion. Non-Being entails neither Becoming nor Being because in it one is not utilizing the present moment and the



data or feelings in it to any significant extent. One trades the possibilities of the present moment for a wishful return to some past moment in which one experienced Being (not Becoming). But in failing to respond positively to existential anxiety, one drifts toward entropy.

Existential anxiety is not evil, but it is the most difficult thing in life we must respond to. Often, we respond entropically.

Next I will demonstrate that pride, idolatry, and sloth are ways to respond entropically to existential anxiety.

## CHAPTER 3

### NON-BEING AS RESPONSE TO EXISTENTIAL ANXIETY

In the previous chapter I explained the nature of existential anxiety, and how the tension it produces can result in Non-Being and eventually entropy. In this chapter I want to show that the analysis of sin by Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, and Karl Barth confirm what I have said. Niebuhr views sin primarily as pride, Tillich as idolatry, and Barth as sloth. It is my contention that pride, idolatry, and sloth are all negative responses to existential anxiety leading toward entropy.

#### A. NIEBUHR AND PRIDE

It is my contention that the prideful person is anxious in much the same way that the man on the raft is. Neither one wants to give up that which they have for that which they know is better. What I intend to show is that humans often utilize pride as a way of blocking the pain produced by existential anxiety, and that this can only result eventually in entropy. It would be much better to learn to be open to novelty and God's call which condemns our pride; yet at the same time lures us to better ourselves.

Niebuhr talks about four different types of pride, but for simplicity, I am going to narrow in on the pride of knowledge; and more specifically on the pride of the philosopher.

Our knowledge is always limited by time and place, and we are somewhat aware of what those limits are -- animals are not. Because we are aware of these limits, we can in a sense transcend them. We do this through our awareness that the present situation is but part of a larger whole. And yet we have to comprehend the whole from our finite perspectives. We are therefore subject to skepticism when we realize the incompleteness and relativity of our knowledge. And we recognize that our most mighty spiritual endeavors teeter on the brink of meaninglessness when compared to the larger infinite whole. And we also discover that we can do nothing and regard it perfectly done, because higher possibilities are revealed to us in each achievement. We then become anxious because we have not become what we know we can become; but we also have anxiety that we may cease to exist at all in any moment. So we are tempted to deny the limited character of our knowledge, and the finiteness of our perspectives. Instead, we pretend to have achieved a knowledge which is actually beyond the limit of our finiteness<sup>1</sup> and extends past our capabilities.

We become anxious when our ambition to be something becomes prompted by the fear of meaninglessness which threatens us by reason of the contingent character of our existence. Our creativity is therefore always corrupted by some effort to overcome contingency by raising precisely what is contingent to absolute and unlimited dimensions.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), I, 182.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., I, 185.

Take the philosopher for example.<sup>3</sup> "The philosopher is anxious to arrive at the truth; but he is anxious to prove that his particular truth is the truth."<sup>4</sup> The philosopher is "never as completely in possession of the truth as he imagines."<sup>5</sup> "This pretension of final truth is always partly an effort to obscure a darkly felt consciousness of the limits of human knowledge."<sup>6</sup> The philosopher's pretension is an attempt to hide the fact of his ignorance and to obscure the problem of his skepticism<sup>7</sup> -- his knowledge that any philosophical system is naive when compared to the knowledge contained in the infinite, or whole. The man on the raft does very much the same thing, and so do we in our prideful ways.

The great philosophical thinker knows that he should shift to new and better theories as they present themselves. For some this shift is no big deal. The ones who experience Being look forward to new theories to take into account. This keeps life from becoming boring to them, and also prevents them from experiencing Non-Being and eventual entropy. But for others who strongly believe that they are the final thinker and that their theories are the final theories, shifting to new ones can be painful. The more the individual thinks that his

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., I, 184-185.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., I, 184.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., I, 184-185.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., I, 185.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

truth is the final truth, the more pain is experienced in giving up that truth for a new one. Not giving up the old truth can only result in entropy, while responding to the new truth entails being open to novelty and God's call.

But it is hard for those who really think that they are the final thinkers and their truths are the final truths. These thinkers who hold on to theories even when they become outdated eventually come to realize that their truths are not the best truths and that better ones lie out there to be grasped and taken hold of. For them shifting from "their theory" to another one that they have come across in their studies can be the same experience as that experienced by the man in the raft. They are afraid that in giving up their theories they will fall into the abyss before they can adopt new ones. The feeling experienced is the threat of death -- knowing that they can have a better philosophical theory as their own, as their intuition tells them, yet having their senses scream to them that they will fall into the abyss if they make just one more step toward the new theory. The stronger the pride, the stronger the threat of death; and the more existential anxiety as a result. They cannot endure this tension for long -- the fear of death but knowing they should do it anyway.

They relieve this tension by denying the contingent character of their existence. They tell themselves that their truth is the best truth that could ever be. They say to themselves, there is nothing like it in the world and there never will be.

Not grasping new truths can only lead to entropy. God presents us with new truths to adopt (this is knowledge about how our theory can be improved). But by trying to forget that the new truth awaits us -- by being prideful of our present truth and making that truth a matter of ultimate concern -- we are sinning because we are not being open to that which God presents us. We sin when we consciously choose to forget that which we know to be true, i.e. that the new truth is out there calling to us.

God presents us with knowledge that there are other rafts, i.e. the knowledge that a certain truth we hold is not really the truth after all. It is up to us to jump to the new raft, i.e. to start doing specific things to change our beliefs about that truth through praxis. Pride tells us that the new truth is not as important as the old. The person guilty of intellectual pride "forgets that it is involved in a temporal process and imagines itself in complete transcendence over history".<sup>8</sup> This is saying in essence, my raft is the most important raft that is and ever will be. This may even be true for a time, but eventually all truths change. By trying to keep hold of one truth we will start to experience Non-Being as we use the energy needed to be open to new truths to keep the old truth viable in our eyes. This can also only lead to entropy as we become less and less open to novelty. People who experience Being, however, would be open to the eventuality that their truth is going to be outdated.

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., I, 196.

People who do not have pride in their old truths can make the transition to the new truth easily. But the more pride people have, the more trouble they have accepting the new truth (jumping onto the new raft). It can be a very painful process to people who have made the outdated truth a matter of ultimate concern. These people would experience existential anxiety as they become aware that the old truth they possess is not good enough any more; but because they have put so much stock into it, it is hard to give it up even though they realize that by accepting the new truth they would be more in touch with what is truly real.

This is where the raft example works. A man holding onto the old truth (old raft) knows that the new truth (new raft) is waiting for him. But, he does not want to jump because accepting the new truth means that he has to cross the water where he does not have any truths to believe in and may fall into the water and cease to exist, being beliefless. The more pride this man has, the more existential anxiety he is going to experience when trying to give up the old truth. Entropy would eventually follow because he failed to accept the new truth. He would also be sinning because he did not accept the new truth when he knew better. Pride is thus related to entropy because pride always entails not making the jump to novelty; and eventually that has to result in entropy and sin. The more pride, the more entropy.

God provides an alternative to entropy, though we ourselves must gain the strength to accept that which is presented to us. Most of us cannot because of our existential anxiety, and so we experience

Non-Being by being prideful (or idolatrous or slothful). Instead of taking into account new theories (novelty) we pretend that our theory is the only one that exists and we elevate it to absoluteness. Few of us experience Being and make the most of new theories by incorporating them through praxis. Most of us muddle along -- and experience Becoming -- knowing that something better exists, but not having any notion as to how to go about experiencing it.

Pride is also very subtle. For one thing, pridefulness is rarely conscious. Usually it is deep in our subconscious where it determines our behavior. The belief that our truths are the best is just one of the assumptions we have about life. At times however, we have the nagging suspicion that something is missing from our lives and that we are not complete, or that we have fallen behind the times. At times we may even realize that like a baby bird we too are ready to leave the nest and learn how to fly. But we do not know how. The more we think about it, the more pain it causes us as our intuition pushes us to look at other truths besides the ones we pridefully hold on to. Once our senses tell us to stop we experience existential anxiety. (And all of a sudden we are on a raft going downstream.) At that point, our prideful nature has usually risen to a conscious intellectual level where we are going to relieve the tension either by experiencing Being and accepting the new theories we read about (and thereby accept novelty), or by experiencing Non-Being by totally ignoring these theories and trying to forget that they exist. In other words, we are either going to respond positively to novelty -- accept the new theories, make the most of them and experience



Being -- or do our best to avoid it by upholding our pride, and thereby experience Non-Being and eventually entropy.

Next I will show how Tillich's concept of idolatry entails responding entropically to existential anxiety.

## B. TILlich AND IDOLATRY

According to Paul Tillich, faith is the state of being ultimately concerned.<sup>9</sup> Tillich also notes that if something claims ultimacy it demands the total surrender of the person who accepts this claim, and it promises total fulfillment even if all other claims have to be subjected to it or rejected in its name.<sup>10</sup>

For the people of the Old Testament, faith was being ultimately and unconditionally concerned about Jahweh and about what He represented in demand, threat and promise.<sup>11</sup> This type of faith was ever changing as it met new demands from God. For the Christian this is also very much the case, because Jesus changed the legalism of the commandments to the real heart of the matter, e.g. not only did Jesus condemn adultery, but he also expanded it to include looking at another woman lustfully (Matthew 5:27f).

To have faith in God once meant that we were limited in what we could do to another person who had injured us if we were to follow God's will for us. (We could only take an eye for an eye, a tooth for

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Tillich, Dynamics of Faith (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1957), p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

a tooth, etc. But we couldn't kill a person just because he had accidentally put out our eye. (Exodus 21: 23 & 24; Leviticus 24: 19ff.) Jesus expanded this to mean that we should take no revenge at all, but rather turn the other cheek (Matthew 5: 38f).

What I am getting at is that people who are ultimately concerned about doing God's will end up changing their behavior along the route that God demands. For instance, the whole area of Liberation Theology is something that committed Christians of today must seriously contemplate when they realize that their lifestyle is oppressive to the rest of humanity, and then they must seek alternative lifestyles in order to keep the commandment, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22: 39).

But being ultimately concerned about God means more than just following certain commandments. People who are ultimately concerned about God place secondary importance on everything else, e.g. money, family, friends, food, admiration, power, and especially self. God is what is important and all else is only secondary. This frees people so that they do not have to worry about other things, e.g. "When am I going to get my revenge on the person who did such and such to me?"

People who are ultimately concerned about God, have the best opportunity to make the most of the moment; because nothing else is distracting them. They can be open to God's novelty -- sometimes seen as new commandments -- as no one else can, precisely because God is their ultimate, and only, concern. Nothing else is as important to them as God. And they above all other people would be open to God's lure which changes them so that they can become who they can become. These people

participate fully in the occasion and experience Being to the limits to which human beings are capable, because nothing blocks them from being open to novelty and God's call. Nothing distracts these people from doing God's will either (and that is making the most of the moment), because complying with that will is what is ultimately important for them.

But many people are ultimately concerned about things besides God. Tillich uses the example of success. He notes that success is the god of many people in the highly competitive Western culture and that it does what every ultimate concern must do: it demands unconditional surrender to its laws even if the price is the sacrifice of genuine human relationships, personal conviction, and creative eros.<sup>12</sup> For people who are ultimately concerned about success everything else is of secondary importance. And whatever the god success demands of them they will be more than willing to do, because they believe that the pay-off (being successful) is worth it. They think success will obtain for them what they need or want. People can have faith in success simply because success matters ultimately for the life of those believers.

According to Tillich, in idolatrous faith preliminary finite realities are elevated to the rank of ultimacy;<sup>13</sup> e.g. success becomes an ultimate concern. The inescapable consequence of idolatrous faith however, is "existential disappointment".<sup>14</sup> This is so because even

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

though idolatrous faith, like all faith, is the centered act of a personality; it is centered on something which is more or less on the periphery. Therefore idolatrous faith will lead to a loss of the center and to a disruption of the personality. The ecstatic character of even an idolatrous faith can hide this consequence for only a short time. Finally it must break out into the open.

This is readily seen in the example of idolatrous faith centered around success. People who are ultimately concerned about success may be quite ecstatic for a number of years as by-products of their idolatry come in, e.g. prestige, power, money, public attention, etc. But sooner or later the god of success lets these people down in an "existential disappointment". They may be very successful, but slowly and surely they are subtly bombarded with the cost of worshipping this god, e.g. divorce, friends lost, children never played with and known, high blood pressure, and having to give constant attention to what the success entails instead of being able to enjoy other things in life. Eventually "success" is shown to be what it truly is -- a god not worth worshipping.

But there are other idols in our culture today. Power, sex, our own egos, a certain job, a certain way of life, and a whole array of drugs can all fall into this category. As a further illustration I am going to talk about alcoholism.

It may be hard to imagine how someone can make a god of alcohol, yet it happens all the time. All gods must give something in return for their being worshipped; and all of them demand something from the worshippers. Most of us at one time or another have had an alcoholic

beverage, so we know basically what alcohol gives to those who drink it. There is a slight feeling of contentment, warmth, and security; as well as a feeling of being on top of the world, and not knowing anyone or anything that can bring you down. This is a little exaggerated but it is a glimpse of the state alcoholics find themselves in. And alcoholics make alcohol their ultimate concern -- something that casual drinkers do not.

For alcoholics these things that I have mentioned are vitally important. The high produced by the ingestion of alcohol is what concerns them most in life -- everything else is secondary. Especially in the early stages of alcoholism the ecstatic character of this god is revealed. And alcohol does become a god. It gives wonderful feelings of euphoria to those who use it, and a constant state of "intoxication" -- and all that that means -- to those who use it often.

But alcohol also demands certain things of its worshippers. For one thing, it demands that a certain amount of money be spent on it. And alcoholics will often spend money on alcohol before they spend it on anything else. So the alcoholics's family often suffers because money needed for food and other necessities is spent on alcohol. And so alcoholics obtain the constant state of intoxication by ignoring all other money concerns.

But the god alcohol demands other things too. Because alcohol is what matters most, everything else must stay in secondary place. And so alcoholics do not even allow health to be as important as drinking -- many alcoholics end up dying of liver disease rather than giving up their

god. That is a pretty hefty price to pay for making an idol out of something! And other things are given up too in the worshipping of this god, e.g. the cultivation of good friends, strengthening a good marriage, enjoying the small things in life, etc.

One of the things that alcohol does best is relieve the tension of existential anxiety -- while under the influence of alcohol people do not usually feel like finite creatures who will soon die, but rather like infinite gods who allow the world to revolve around themselves. Even the less complex problems of daily living vanish after a drink or two.

Another manifestation of worshippers of alcohol is that they are not open to novelty because the alcohol is all that is important to them. God luring the alcoholics to become what they can become is absurd, because alcoholics do not care about novelty and God's call. Though the gift of life is experiencing and enjoying novelty, alcoholics want nothing more than to be intoxicated. There is no newness or freshness in life for those who have been ultimately concerned about drinking for a number of years. There is only the task of doing whatever is necessary to obtain the desired drink and then the problem of getting enough of it to satisfy themselves for another day.<sup>15</sup>

God constantly lures us to become what we can become through the introduction of novelty. People who only care about alcohol, however, do not care about this. Alcohol is their main concern. While they are most inflicted by their disease, they only care about their drink. During

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<sup>15</sup> For a good account of the life of an alcoholic see Greg Martin, Spiritus Contra Spiritum (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977)

this time they only want to get drunk, and to stay that way, though they may feel guilty about doing this.<sup>16</sup>

One definition of entropy is a state of existence in which the outcome is predictable -- this is so because there is no novelty to change things. Unfortunately, this is the status for alcoholics. The outcome is all too clear. Friends, family, money, jobs, are all bound to leave and eventually only bad health and death are left.

People who are ultimately concerned about alcohol are definitely drifting toward, or are already in, a state of entropy. Novelty is irrelevant. To make the most of the moment would mean having a drink -- probably a double -- for alcoholics. The question, "How can I use this moment to enable myself to become who I can become?" is absurd for alcoholics. Alcohol is the main concern and all else is secondary. But as Tillich points out, the inescapable consequence of idolatrous faith is "existential disappointment".<sup>17</sup> This is true of all idols, not just alcohol.

So, alcoholism can be a form of religion just as any idolatry can be. Idols, however, always let us down as they demand more and more of the energy that we should use to be open to novelty and God's call. Ultimately this results in death -- and a state of entropy may exist before this.

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<sup>16</sup>However, Clinebell reports that he has never met an alcoholic that has gotten sober who has not changed and experienced growth.

<sup>17</sup>Tillich, p. 12.

There is only one thing that is worthy of being worshipped: the God who calls us where we are and lures us on to become that which we can become -- even though we are quite satisfied with the way things are. Any other god will eventually put us in an entropic state of existence, because only God has the power to bring novelty into the world; and only God lures us to make the most of the moment, to become what we can become, and to enjoy life as much as we possibly can along the way.

From my standpoint, good is the experience of novelty because it is through this that new life is forged. Evil is participating in idolatry, because it is here that entropy and death are found. Good is ultimately concerned about God and doing God's will which entails being open to novelty and making the most of the moment. Evil cares more about doing other things instead, e.g. drinking, pursuing success, etc. Being ultimately and primarily concerned about God's novelty is what really matters in life. Idolatry is one method that is used to relieve existential anxiety, yet eventually it is shown for what it truly is -- worship of a god whose only power is to give a state of entropy -- or hell.

Next I will demonstrate that just as the previous two examples have shown, Barth's concept of sloth also entails responding entropically to existential anxiety.



## C. BARTH AND SLOTH

According to Karl Barth, the sin of humans is the sloth of humans.<sup>18</sup> Another way to speak of sloth is sluggishness, indolence, slowness, or inertia.<sup>19</sup>

Sloth is that which not only fails to correspond to the divine direction, but is alien and opposed to it. As a refusal to act, sloth encompasses not doing what God wills and therefore it does what God does not will.<sup>20</sup> To put the case even stronger: sloth consists not only in refusal to trust God, but also in failure to love God. And people who do not love God must turn their backs on God and behave like a frightened hedgehog who withdraws into itself and exposes its prickly spikes to the outside world. Sloth has in it the action of hate which wants to be free of God; prefers, in other words: not to be illuminated by the existence and nature of God, not to have to accept God, and to actually be without God in the world.<sup>21</sup>

Sloth therefore resists God. It turns in upon itself finding satisfaction and comfort in the ego.<sup>22</sup> It is a saying "No" to what God has to offer in the new life offered by the person Jesus Christ. It is

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<sup>18</sup>Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics (Edinburgh: Clark, 1958), IV/2, 403.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., IV/2, 404.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., IV/2, 405

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., IV/2, 407.

an inaction, a responsible and culpable refusal to act toward that which one inwardly knows will make one an entirely new creature. For Barth, sin in the form of sloth crystalizes in the rejection of the man Jesus, because it is in Christ that the divine direction and summons and claim come to humans.<sup>23</sup>

Sloth is therefore sin because it says "No" to what God has to offer. It is conscious inaction when it comes to doing the will of God as it is spoken and made known. And not only does sloth want to ignore that there is God's will to be done,<sup>24</sup> but it wants to forget that there is any God at all. And why? Because the sinful egotistical self is more important than doing the will of God. It is this part of the self that rules these particular human beings. This self guides them like a rudder on a ship. And this self attempts to block out all else -- especially God -- in a vain attempt to take control over its destiny and fate.

But what happens in this instance? These people not only lose touch with God's will, but their egotistical selves become the most important thing in life. Now if they could totally forget God and neglect God's call which attempts to help them to become what God would have them become -- and in the process become one hundred percent evil -- they would never experience any existential anxiety. Fortunately, however, this is not possible. When evil least expects it, God's mercy is there to upset the apple cart, and all of a sudden the whole system is shaken when they realize that they are not open to novelty.

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., IV/2, 405.

<sup>24</sup>Note how this desire for forgetfulness resembles the process concept of evil.

This is what happens when the person living on the raft, going down stream with the bare necessities of life, realizes that God is holding out more; and that a leap of faith is needed to get to a new raft where life is more enjoyable. Tension is then produced when the ego contemplates, even for a moment, giving up what it knows for what is promised by an invisible God.

And slothful people say to themselves, "I'm going to do nothing and eventually the problem will go away and take care of itself." (The ostrich does the same thing by burying its head in the sand. But for humans this activity is not an instinct or a natural reaction; but rather a conscious choice to refuse to act. This is sin.) These people absolutely refuse to see the light of day, and prefer darkness instead.

But even slothful people cannot forever forget that there are new rafts to jump to, new acts of faith to accomplish, and a will of God to follow even though the tension it produces tears their guts apart. These people have got to move on. But it is the characteristic of slothful people to say: "I'll do it later. Later I'll do what God wants. Later I'll tend to my soul. Later I'll look into Godly affairs. For now I'm not going to do anything, I refuse." (Of such a man Jesus said, "This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" Luke 12: 16ff, RSV).

What happens when people say no to God's call and then try to forget that the call was ever there? What happens when their selfish interests become more important than accepting what God's will would have them do? At first they experience mild existential anxiety, but

really slothful people push this aside, and let the sinful self have control. But when they are not open to the newness that God calls them toward, they are closed to it -- and that means that they can only drift toward an entropic state where the ego is immersed in a predictable state of affairs, which after a long time becomes boring, senseless, and dull -- hell.

For what does not keep up with God's call -- accepting novelty -- must drift toward entropy. It is the character of good people to accept the newness of God's will for themselves and the rest of the world without regard to their egotistical selves. Evil people, however, are at the opposite end; they care only for the egotistical self, they do not listen for the word of God, nor do they move toward the will of God; but rather they refuse to act, and end up trying to forget that a God even exists so that they can stay drunk forever, or be prideful forever, or just sit back and do nothing forever. Eventually egotistical people do not accept the will of God, but attach themselves to the comfortable predictable ways of the egotistical self. This is not only entropic, but hellish.

So, slothful people, who are not open to the will of God, but rather drag their feet, must in the end drift toward a predictable state: and one in which entropy is an eventual outcome, unless the grace of God lures them on to something better and they respond to God's call.

Slothfulness is thus another instance in which people are closed off from novelty and God's call. This is experiencing Non-Being and entropy will eventually be the result.

Sloth, idolatry, and pride are thus inter-related in a very special way. They all entail a saying no to what God has to offer in the way of novelty, and a saying yes to something which is not quite as beneficial.

In slothfulness, one is essentially too lazy to accept what God has to offer. One just does not care. In idolatry, something in the external world disguises itself as God and one spends all of one's energy worshipping it instead of the real God. In pridefulness, the self is more important than God. The self dictates how one's energy will be utilized. The self becomes the center of worship, not God.

The problem with all three of these things is that they close one off from novelty. They either say they do not care, or that they already have what they need. This would be all right if we lived in a static world, but we do not.

Our world is constantly changing. Novelty is constantly coming into it. And we have to do something with it. We can synthesize it through objective reality for a time, but sooner or later we must incorporate it and experience Being; or we must discard it and experience Non-Being. There is no other way. We can experience Becoming and later Being and be open to novelty, or we can choose to experience Non-Being and be closed off to it.

The problem, though, is that if we are not open to novelty we must drift toward a state of entropy. That is what many people do by becoming overly lazy, by worshipping false idols which appear to produce

their own lifegiving novelty, or by being so prideful of their egotistical selves that they think they already have all they need. But, in doing so they close themselves off to novelty, experience Non-Being and eventually entropy.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROCESS THEISM

If we could think at all of a world apart from God, it would be a world of repetition lapsing into lesser and lesser forms of order according to the principle of entropy. What happened in each occasion could only be the declining outgrowth of what had happened before. It is God who by confronting the world with unrealized opportunities, opens up a space for freedom and self-creativity.<sup>1</sup>

The proper way to respond to novelty is to make the most of it. But just because we know what we should do does not mean that we can. Often we respond to existential anxiety with pride, idolatry, or sloth. I have demonstrated in the previous chapter that responding to existential anxiety with these responses can only lead us toward entropy. These responses are not making the most of novelty, but are throwing away the opportunities we have to enjoy life in all its richness and fullness. Only by having a system of faith that can enable us to take the risks necessary to respond positively to existential anxiety can we really begin to enjoy life. I will describe in this chapter how process theism can accomplish this.

#### A. WHAT IT CONSISTS OF

The only way to overcome existential anxiety is to have faith not only that what we do during our lifetime is important to God, but

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<sup>1</sup> John B. Cobb, Jr., and David Ray Griffin, Process Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 29.

also that what we do in each and every moment counts as far as God is concerned. Only so will we muster the guts it takes to make the most of each moment without worrying about the future. The good we accomplish not only needs to be important and matter ultimately to God, but we must believe that God never forgets our good deeds if we are really ever going to be able to take the leap of faith to do what we must.<sup>2</sup> I believe that process theism gives us a way of thinking that supports the faith we need. I now intend to demonstrate this by a review of process theism.

According to process theism, God is that being which creates all things. God creates not only our planet and solar system, but also all the other stars and their solar systems. But God has done more than just put the stars in motion and then watch to see what happened. God is independent of our experience, yet at the same time God affects our experience.<sup>3</sup> In other words, God is an active participant in our world that is His creation.

God influences each new occasion (the moment in which something occurs), by providing a purpose for it differing from that entertained by any previous occasion. God lures the new occasion beyond the mere

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<sup>2</sup>Of course these deeds are valuable in and of themselves because of the enjoyment and benefits we get out of them. But unless we know that they really matter ultimately to God, few of us would ever get past our existential anxiety which prevents us from doing them in the first place.

<sup>3</sup>John B. Cobb, Jr., God and the World (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 60.



repetition of past purposes and past feelings or new combinations among them. God, and only God, is thus the one who calls us beyond all that we have become to what we might be.<sup>4</sup> But not only does God influence every occasion of experience, God is also affected by each because God "takes up into himself the whole richness of each experience, synthesizing its values in the immediacy of his own life".<sup>5</sup>

Schubert Ogden makes the statement that what happens in the world really matters only if it matters ultimately and everlastingly.<sup>6</sup> And since only God is everlasting, we must make the faith statement that what really matters in the world matters ultimately to God. God saves everlastingly what is redeemable in the world. Only an active God who is interested in the outcome of the world would do this.

So we really have two aspects of God the participant: 1) God who induces change in the world by luring it to become what it can become, and 2) God who increases in richness as the world changes by saving everlastingly what is of ultimate value.

The symbol or image that I would like to use for the concept God the participant, is a loving parent who will never die. This parent is both mother and father. This parent is so loving that it wants us to become whatever we can become, no matter what the personal cost to

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<sup>4</sup>I am relying heavily on Ibid., p. 82, at this point.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>6</sup>Schubert M. Ogden, The Reality of God (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), pp 47-48.

itself. Even if we deserve to be punished, this very loving parent will take the responsibility for our sinfulness.<sup>7</sup>

But this parent does more than just clean up after our sinfulness. This parent entices and lures us on to change for the better. This change always includes using novelty, which only God can provide. Without God the loving parent luring us with novelty, we would ultimately experience entropy. This parent knows what is best for us, and lures us to take full responsibility for our becoming, while making it possible for us to do so. An example of this would be a parent of an eight year old who gives a book or a toy to its child. The parent is introducing something novel into the situation which will allow the child to grow, while at the same time allowing the child to accept full responsibility for that growth. The child can throw the book away, glance at it, read it quickly, or read it slowly and ask questions about it. But what the child does with it is the child's responsibility. The parent can only hope for the best. God did this same type of thing when He sent His Son, Jesus Christ into the world. In the matter of Jesus Christ, God gave us so much responsibility that God allowed us to crucify God's only begotten Son, while God stood by, watched, and suffered. The resurrection was radical proof, to our dismay, that Jesus was God's Son.

We can reject this loving parent, but this loving parent who is God will never reject us. As a matter of fact, this loving parent redeems whatever is redeemable in our actions. In other words, what is

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<sup>7</sup> An example of this is in Hosea 11:1-9.

of value is redeemed by God, and God saves forevermore our good actions. It is like the parent who will remember as long as he or she lives something good that we did when we were a child. Take, for instance, bringing home good grades in the first grade. A loving parent would cherish forever our first grade report that had high marks on it. Well God is similar except that God will never die, nor ever forget those good marks. Now let's say that the child forgets what it learned in the first grade and then gets poor marks in the second. Well our loving human parent will tend to remember the good grades out of love and compassion while being a little hurt that we didn't do better. Well our heavenly parent does this, but much more so. Since God knows that eventually the child will have to remember some of what it learned in the first grade, God would lure it to do so, while at the same time remembering the good grades and the growth that took place in obtaining them in the first place. God the heavenly parent does not hold bad grades against us -- even though God does not totally ignore them -- but remembers the best we have done while luring us on to the better.

As my last image of God the loving parent I want to show how God increases in richness as new experiences occur in the world. Take the child who brought home good grades in the first place. His parent was delighted if that parent was loving at all. But as that child grew and enriched itself during the time that it was making those good grades, the parent could only stand back, make suggestions about what the child should do whenever it faced a problem, and watch. The parent would have no idea if his suggestions, love and guidance were paying off until the

day the grade report came home affirming that the child was indeed progressing. Well this is new knowledge for the parent. Hopefully the child even excelled in some areas that the parent did not know that the child had any talent or abilities in. This new knowledge would enrich the parent's world. With God the same thing happens except that God does not have to wait so long before God feels the effect of the world being enriched by a child increasing its artistic ability, even if it is just using paints for the first time. God is aware in the occasion itself when something in the world enriches itself. God and the world are enriched -- however slightly -- while I'm writing this for example. Just think how much more God's world, and God, are enriched by a Picasso or a Rembrandt!

Even though Helmut Thielicke is not a process theologian, he has been hailed by process thinkers because his writings seem to put so much of what Whitehead said in abstractions into concrete images. I would like therefore to go beyond the abstractness that I have covered so far and utilize Thielicke as a way of showing what I'm getting at in this chapter.

Concerning Christian faith, Thielicke describes God's love. For Thielicke, the deepest secret of God's love is that it does not consist in God's making this world into a paradise. Rather, the opposite is true. God must constantly give humans up to their own hopelessness, their own pride, and their own failure.<sup>8</sup> He goes further by saying that

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<sup>8</sup> Helmut Thielicke, How to Believe Again (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), p. 47.

God stays with humans in their misery and even says to them in a quiet whisper, "Your pain is my pain, and my own heart cries out over your sentence and your punishment".<sup>9</sup>

We find the love of God most prominent in the suffering of Jesus. For here God himself suffers with us, standing under his own judgement. And here He himself grieves over the punishment He must bring upon us. In showing God's love Jesus suffer all loneliness, all enmity, all forsakenness by God, all fear of death, and he shares in the suffering of all temptations and all divine judgement upon human self-destruction. This is what God's love does for us. It does not escort us to earth from beyond the blue with heavenly sympathy and divine goodwill (providence); but it waits for us in such a way that it walks beside us, suffering with us whatever judgement or terror we must endure, going through it as a brother at our side. Here, in the midst of our sorrow and anxiety, we grip the hand that will be scorched along with ours -- here and nowhere else. God does not renounce His faithfulness to us, and while one hand must smite us, the other helps, holds, and comforts us.<sup>10</sup>

God thus introduces novelty into the world -- which can be painful as well as pleasurable -- and then sticks with us as we suffer through the pain this causes us, or as we celebrate the joy it brings. But either way, God is still by our side partaking of both our joys and

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp 48-49.

our sorrows. It is a hard lot that God has: creating novelty in the world which sometimes brings joy and other times pain to us humans, and then having to remain with us to share the consequences of His creation as a loving parent would do. But the responsibility is God's and not ours. Our anxieties do nothing for us. Our task is rather to make the most of each precious moment that God gives us as a free gift. Not all these gifts are pleasant, but it is what we do with them that counts. No gift should be thrown away and not made good use of. The unpleasant gifts give us a chance to strengthen our inner spiritual selves. And besides, God will be at our sides suffering with us, forever remembering the good we can make out of even the painful experiences in life which are just as much a part of God's creation as the pleasant ones.<sup>11</sup>

#### B. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROCESS THEISM AND CONCEPT OF BEING

The concept of Being entails full participation in the here and now. The only way to do this is to avoid over analyzing the situations we find ourselves in, and to make the most of each and every moment. We can easily visualize this when we look at a rainbow for instance. We should go further than just analyzing the rainbow (unless we want to be the objective scientist for a while), and enjoy it. The rainbow does not need to have a purpose or a goal -- it is just there and it is okay

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<sup>11</sup>I cannot satisfactorily answer the question, "Why must we suffer pain?" except to say that we are finite creatures with limited capabilities and resources. Thus we cannot withstand all the possibilities for pain and suffering that we come into contact with in our daily existence.

for us to enjoy it. And just the same, we do not need to have a purpose or a goal when we look at it -- we can just look.

So, a person making the most of the moment, looking at and enjoying the beautiful colors of the rainbow, is experiencing Being, and is not letting anything come in between himself and his enjoyment of the rainbow. There would be no goals in life to be concerned about, and no anxieties to worry over. There would only be the present moment, and enjoying the rainbow fills up all that occurs in that moment.<sup>12</sup>

Enjoying this rainbow can even mean so much to us, because of the tranquility and peace of mind that it allows us to experience, that this might be one of our most pleasant experiences.

Well, according to process theism, God suffers with us through our pains and sorrows, and also rejoices with us in our joys and triumphs. In the case of the rainbow God could not know what we would do when this natural phenomenon occurred. We could have ignored it, spent a few seconds glancing at it, or stopped where we were and really enjoyed it as fully as we possibly could. The latter action would give us the greatest joy (unless we were taking our wife to the hospital where she was going to have our first child, and then the middle response would have been the best). The greater the joys that we experience the greater the joys that God remembers forever.

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<sup>12</sup>Few people would be able to do this for very long. But that does not mean that we should not practice making it more possible.

So in the case of the rainbow, God is going to have more to enjoy if we stand there and really enjoy the rainbow -- if we participate fully in the occasion (Being). God is not only giving us permission to enjoy the rainbow, but God wants it that way because that gives God more joy.

So anytime we have the opportunity to make the most of a pleasant situation and experience Being, God is going to also be there soaking up and remembering the enjoyable experience that we had. The better the experience, the more God will be able to do this. And because God lures us to become who we can become and to make the most out of each moment, we can infer that we are behaving as God intends for us to behave on the highest level.

In other words, it is okay to enjoy the rainbow. God wants us to make the most out of it. God is the one who made rainbows possible in the first place. God is the one who at times gets us to notice the beautiful rainbow which is God's creation. It is only right and proper that we would make the most of it and enjoy it to its fullest. It is even reinforcing to know that the more enjoyment we get out of it, the more God will have to remember forever. If we go chasing after the pot of gold at the end of this rainbow, God can only redeem what is redeemable, and in that case it would not be very much.

So, the process theism idea of God coincides with the concept of Being and actually reinforces the activity that underlies that concept.



What I have done so far is speak about how nice it is that God remembers our good times long after we die. There is nothing wrong with this concept, especially since it means that we should make the most out of every moment and enjoy rainbows as much as we can. It is my belief that realizing this and understanding it will make us want to experience more of it, and also that God would want that. A simple conclusion based on what I have said so far would be that when we are having a good time in life, enjoying the rainbows and all that, God is right there beside us enjoying it too. I think that we can all accept that and even give ourselves permission to enjoy a few more rainbows because of it.

But what about the painful and hard times? Where is this God who redeems what is redeemable then? What happens when the novelty God introduces us to is not pleasant? Actually, the same place as before -- right beside us sharing with us our experiences. Let's follow through an example.

Almost everyone has had a bad flu that has made them ill for a week or so. It was not a pleasurable experience and we didn't enjoy it one single bit. It might not have even seemed very fair at the time because we had to miss doing a few things we really wanted to do; and so few of those around us got the flu as bad as we did.

We know what caused the flu -- a simple microorganism. And we might even be able to give it a scientific name. We could do certain things to make ourselves feel comfortable during our illness, and we could take things to shorten and lessen the misery that we had to go through.

But we could still ask the same question, "Why, God? Why did you make me get so sick? Why can't I go out and do what I want to do?" It would be easy for God to answer these questions: 1) For no reason at all. 2) I did not make you get sick, I just more or less let it happen. I made all living things, and I am sorry that some of them are not good for you. But everything has a right to live, and I have made the best world I could -- actually it is quite an accomplishment. 3) The reason you can't go out and do what you would like to do is because a microorganism has invaded your body and it is trying to live off of you, and so there is a fight going on inside of you that has left you unable to do the things that you are accustomed to doing. You will probably get well in a week or so, but there is also the remote chance that you will die as a result of your illness.

Now that God has answered our questions -- the same way any good doctor could -- we often still want to know what we can do immediately to get rid of the flu.

God does not abandon us in our sickness anymore than God abandons us when we have our good times. God is there, even if we refuse to acknowledge God doing the thankless job of redeeming whatever is redeemable in our actions. God is also there suffering with us and sharing our pain and misery. But God can not just magically upset the whole system and cure us -- at least not that often. For even microorganisms that are harmful to some humans are part of God's creation -- they too need to survive -- and unfortunately there is just no way to make it possible for finite creatures to withstand all pain, suffering and death.

So God does what is next best. God suffers with us, just as a brother or sister would. God knows we hurt and God will also remember our hurt forever -- just as God does our joys. Our task is still the same -- discovering how we can make the most of the moment. We might still enjoy a rainbow even though we would not necessarily get as much joy out of it as we normally would. We might write a letter to a friend, call someone up, or even read a good book. If we can't read because of our illness, we could listen to the radio, or talk to someone and cheer them up. We do not need to just lie there and complain about what God has done to us. We should think instead about what God has done for us. God has given us many good things.

Even if we are ill God is still there with us experiencing with us our pain and saving forever what is redeemable. Perhaps that pain is never so real or great as when we come face to face with death. Then there may be nothing to enjoy as we lie in an Intensive Care Unit in a hospital with tubes going into the outside of our bodies while cancer is eating away the inside. There may not be very much to enjoy as we come into contact with a painful death that grips us harder than anything has gripped us before. But we can still experience Being as we try to make the most of our moments. Perhaps all we can do is visualize our good memories and be grateful for the opportunity to live. We can smile at the staff who come in to check to see how long it will be now before we pass on. Or we can even appreciate death and the chance to get to know God better. But the more we make out of the last moments of our lives, the more God has to remember on and on, past our death, our children's death, and their children's death.

In conclusion, by using process theism we can have the faith to learn to make the most of each moment. Not all moments are full of joy, and eventually we all have to face that moment when we die. But God wants and calls us to make the most of all of them. A well lived life is one in which the moments that we had -- joyful or painful -- were made the most of. This is what God hopes for, because God will then have more to remember about us (just as a parent and his or her child). Our task in life is to learn how to make the most of each moment. In doing so we will have to give up some of our objective ways of looking at things.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>For examples of how others describe this see: Robert M. Pirsig, Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance (New York: Bantam, 1980); Annie Dillard, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek (New York: Bantam, 1979); Matthew Fox, On Becoming a Musical Mystical Bear (New York: Paulist Press, 1976); Hugh Prather, Notes to Myself (New York: Bantam, 1976); Hugh Prather, I Touch the Earth, the Earth Touches Me (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972); Hugh Prather, Notes on Love and Courage (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977).

## CHAPTER 5

## BEING AS RESPONSE TO EXISTENTIAL ANXIETY

The call forward is toward intensified life, heightened consciousness, expanded freedom, more sensitive love, but the way lies through the valley of the shadow of death.<sup>1</sup>

In the previous chapter I described how process theism can enable us to risk making the most of the moments we experience during our lifetime. This system of faith can give us the courage needed to jump from one raft to another. It can also build up strength in our muscles so that we can stand under the pressures of existential anxiety, and hopefully make the most of them. However, it is one thing to have the courage and strength, it is another to know how to put them to good use. Both this and the next chapter, therefore, give examples of how to do just that. In this chapter I talk about Being in general and why it is a positive response to existential anxiety. With process theism as our system of faith we are ready to utilize the concept of Being by being open to novelty and accepting God's call, by making the most of the moment, and finally by enjoying peak experiences. In the next chapter I will be even more specific on how we can apply the concept of Being, and thereby respond positively to existential anxiety after we have utilized process theism as our system of faith.

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<sup>1</sup>John B. Cobb, Jr., God and the World (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 56.

#### A. OPENNESS TO NOVELTY AND ACCEPTING GOD'S CALL

All of us have at one time or another in our lives broken a bad habit. After being in school for so long one of my bad habits was to sleep in late. This was a hard habit to break and sometimes I still find myself falling into the old pattern.

But something good happened when I first started getting up a little earlier. I was able to enjoy life a bit more. Usually I spend the time reading, and what I read helps set the tone for the rest of the day. This reading makes me more open to what is going on around me. Whereas before, I got up as soon as possible and started out on my day, I now take more time getting going, and in the process I have opened myself up more to the world around me.

But if I get up too early, I am still too sleepy and groggy to be able to comprehend what I am reading. And this too sets the tone for the rest of the day. I will be tired and will probably yawn a lot. I may fall asleep if I try to do some serious reading, and I may be cranky, feeling that something worthwhile has been taken away from me.

However, I still need to take the risk. Certainly there are going to be some mornings when I should stay in bed a little longer. But most of the time I can be assured of the positive benefits of getting up a little earlier and either reading or going for a walk. Sleeping in late was a small habit, and breaking it did not require much energy or strength -- no matter how I felt in the beginning; but as I have already said, I have benefited greatly. The growth that has occurred because of this is certainly a good thing.

I think what got me to get up earlier and relax before I got busy was a vague sense that I was starting the day out wrong. At some point I realized that it would be better to get up earlier. This was God's call for me in my life. And though it was toward a small area in my life, I have benefited by responding properly to this call. I have also discovered that I often experience Being when I get up early and get in touch with myself before the busy day begins. Responding with Non-Being, however, would even be worse than sleeping in late.

I am sure that all of us could mention a much worse habit that we have fallen into because of our sinful natures. And we just cannot seem to break it. This habit -- what ever it is -- keeps us from being open to novelty and being able to accept God's call, because we are too concerned about our habit and making sure that its needs are met. We are in a sense stuck in the same old rut, and often just as we think we are out of the rut for good -- just as we congratulate ourselves for not even thinking about our habit -- we find ourselves at the bottom of the rut gathering up the needed strength to pull ourselves out and start again.

We usually even realize that these ruts we fall into, because of our habits or patterns of behavior, keep us from being open to novelty and accepting God's call. And because of them we can never experience anything new in the area of our habit. It is just the same old pattern repeated over and over and eventually it becomes entropic.

Most of us have limiting habits in one aspect of our lives or another and most of us always will. But with a little daring and

courage we can break some habits so that growth, freshness and new intensification in those areas of our live are possible. This would entail accepting God's call. Herbert A. Otto once said:

Growth involves change, and change is linked with the appearance of the new. With very few exceptions people tend to avoid the new because they have become habituated to the status quo in themselves and others close to them.<sup>2</sup>

There is the dilemma. We could take the risk, break with the past, and enjoy life more; but we have become habituated to the status quo in ourselves (habits) and in others close to us (social pressures). We are habituated to our life as it is, and we do not want to accept God's call. It was not an accident that William James once said that we are creatures of habit. Give most people a choice and they would choose the same routine to something totally different each time. And even if they say they would prefer the different, how often do they really do so?

The reason we all stick to our past habits and to social pressure is because it hurts too much to let go of them. The pain we normally experience when we think about doing something new and different -- and thereby accepting God's call rather than falling into the same old comfortable pattern -- is existential anxiety. As Clinebell said on this topic, "It hurts to let go of something, however constricting, that has at least made us feel protected".<sup>3</sup> And when we try to overcome something

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<sup>2</sup>Herbert A. Otto (ed.) Marriage and Family Enrichment (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), p. 15.

<sup>3</sup>Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., Growth Counseling for Marriage Enrichment (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 7.



that has made us feel protected we feel naked, bare to the elements and open for all the world to see in the most vulnerable way possible. But we have to do this at times, or experience Non-Being.

Perhaps what we need to keep in mind is what Cobb points out in God and the World: Wieman shows so clearly that one must abandon the goods one knows, not only out of prudent calculation that greater goods are in store, but in commitment to that process in which new goods arise.<sup>4</sup>

There are other ways to respond to God's call than just breaking bad habits that keep us from being open to novelty. Take the philosopher mentioned in Chapter 3 for example. What this philosopher needs to do is to accept new truths instead of sticking his head in the sand, and pretending they do not exist. Another way to respond positively is by listening for suggestions on how we can learn what God is saying in the world, and then taking action on them. There are a multitude of other ways to respond to God's call.

The aim of God's call is for us to take a certain action that is in line with God's desire. This aim always entails our making the most of each and every moment, and thereby experience Being. But the aim of God has a future element to it that is lacking when we just experience Being. Being means making the most of the moment in the here and now, and does not really take the future into consideration. The

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<sup>4</sup>Cobb, p. 56.

aim of God, however, always takes the future into consideration. If it didn't, there might be a future point in which we could not experience Being, because we were totally immersed in Non-Being.

When we perceive God's call, we must first of all utilize objective reality to ensure that it is indeed God's call. Then we need to utilize subjective reality, follow God's call, and do whatever is required of us. Thereby we will experience Being. But the aim of God changes as time progresses. We have to be open to God's constantly changing call which constantly introduces novelty into the world. If we did not do this we would drift from Being to Non-Being, and eventually to entropy.

#### B. EXPERIENCING BEING BY MAKING THE MOST OF THE MOMENT

We are, we are here, we are now, and let it be that way. We can only really celebrate when we are present in the present. If anything has become clear, it is that we have to a large extent lost the capability to live in the present.<sup>5</sup>

But there is another kind of seeing that involves a letting go. When I see this way I sway transfixed and emptied. The difference between the two ways of seeing is the difference between walking with and without a camera. When I walk with a camera, I walk from shot to shot, reading the light on a calibrated meter. When I walk without a camera, my own shutter opens, and the moment's light prints on my own silver gut.<sup>6</sup>

Hugh Prather in a book entitled, Notes to Myself: My Struggle To Become A Person wrote, "When I get to where I can enjoy just lying on the rug picking up lint balls I will no longer be too ambitious".

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<sup>5</sup>Henri J. M. Nouwen, Creative Ministry (Garden City: Doubleday, 1978), p. 96

<sup>6</sup>Annie Dillard, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek (New York: Bantam, 1979), p. 33.

And then the next sentence in his personal notebook says, "I'm holding this cat in my arms so it can sleep, and what more is there."<sup>7</sup> This second sentence is not a question either, but rather an affirmation that what the author is doing really is all that matters in that moment.

It might be hard for us to comprehend that making the most of the moment could mean picking up lint balls on a rug, or holding a sleeping cat in our arms. Yet for Prather this can be so. Why? What is so different about him? I think that the difference lies in the way we see things. I have previously described the differences between subjective and objective reality. The person who utilizes objective reality watches a process occur. The cat climbs in the lap, purrs for a minute or two and then falls asleep after responding favorably to certain strokes. It is a process that is easily observed, and it has an easily predicted outcome: the cat will eventually wake up and jump off, and the process can be quickened if the cat is awakened. The person is observant of the cat falling asleep and a whole array of other things that are involved in the process at hand.

But Prather was "observant" of much less because he was involved in the process. For him being involved was all there was to experience. Nothing else mattered and even though he did not "observe" the occurring process as strongly as we would, he managed to experience more of what was going on in the moments that occurred.

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<sup>7</sup> Hugh Prather, Notes to Myself (New York: Bantam, 1976), p. 17.

I think that the differences between looking at situations objectively versus subjectively would even be stronger if one compared them in the example of picking up lint balls off the carpet. The person experiencing subjective reality would be totally involved; but the person in objective reality could not be, but would probably be bored stiff and some place else mentally.

What I am getting at is what Matthew Fox calls awareness. Awareness for Fox is "the capacity to be wholly involved where one is and to be alert to the possibilities of enjoyment and wonder, awe and beauty, goodness and peace exactly where one is."<sup>8</sup> But what happens is that we let so many other things get to us instead. We worry about the food and drink that we need in order to stay alive, and about the clothes that we need for our bodies (Matthew 7:25, TEV). Jesus's advice to us in this case was not to worry because God knows that we need these things and will provide them and much more (Matthew 7:31ff, TEV). When we worry about things, and thereby let our existential anxiety block our ability to enjoy reality, we cannot be "aware" of what is going on in the here and now. To be aware in the sense that Fox uses the term is to make the most of the moment. And whenever we make the most of the moment, we experience Being.

We need to overcome existential anxiety -- take the risk -- and learn how to enjoy the present moment. Eric Berne had this to say about

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<sup>8</sup>Matthew Fox, On Becoming a Musical Bear (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), p. 78.

this topic, "For us to be able to enjoy the present moment we need to first of all have a clear mind and to forget for the time all forms of shuffling papers, shuffling people, and shuffling things in our head."<sup>9</sup>

Making the most of the moment is not as easy as it may sound. Before we can experience Being, we not only have to make sure that we are making the most of the moment, but we have to make sure that we are following God's call. And once we know that the call is for us in the here and now, we then have to have adequate determination to follow that call. Only by doing this can we experience Being. And then we have the problem that God is constantly calling us to make use of novelty, and to experience Being in that continuing process. With every new call, however, we have the possibility of failure and the experience of Non-Being. But, in the next moment we may get the chance to redeem ourselves. God thus calls alcoholics to stop drinking, to be open to growth, and to experience Being. The best experience of Being is a peak experience, which I will discuss next.

### C. PEAK EXPERIENCES AND THE PROBLEM OF NON-BEING

According to Abraham H. Maslow, a peak experience can be described as the "joyous, happiest, most blissful moment of your whole life".<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Eric Berne, Sex In Human Loving (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), p. 230.

<sup>10</sup>Abraham Maslow, The Farther Reaches of Human Nature (New York: Viking Press, 1977), p. 176.

At another point he talks about "the great joy, the ecstasy, the visions of another world", and "another level of living".<sup>11</sup> And then later on he talks about "the moments of revelation, of illumination, insight, understanding, ecstasy ... bliss and rapture experiences".<sup>12</sup>

All of us have had at one time or another, one of the above experiences. For each of us the experience was different, yet they all shared the same quality of making a profound, long-lasting impression. My highest peak experience occurred when I went snorkeling for the first time. I was in Emerald Bay at Catalina Island, and the water was about ten feet deep and crystal clear; yet it had a slight blue tint to it. Algae was growing in the bottom, and so were other kinds of underwater flora. There were different colors of fish and when I stuck my head underwater and propelled myself along with my flippers, having only a tube sticking out of the water to breathe through, I was transposed from the world I know to a completely different world. And suddenly, after I overcame my fright, my old world seemed no longer to exist, but the experience I was going through seemed to be all there was. I felt completely out of touch with time and space -- as if it was in a different dimension. Peak experiences do not have to be so extreme. An unusual sunset can also produce one. All of us can probably think of a peak experience we have had recently, and also ones that have left their mark on us for all our lives.

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 178.

Peak experiences have a strong impact on us because of their intensity. In a real way, they are the by-products of being open to God's call in as many moments as we can. The more we experience Being, the more peak experiences we will have; yet just because we have a peak experience that does not mean that we are necessarily experiencing Being. We can also experience what I call pseudo-Being.

We can reach pseudo-Being through a number of ways, but all of them are idolatrous in nature. The easiest and most common way in our society is by abusing drugs. Our younger generation often attempts to experience Being in this way. When they go to a rock concert and get high, not only do they escape everyday existential anxiety, but they are almost assured of a peak experience. Yet they do not experience Being, because their actions are not beneficial to themselves or to others -- they do not bear good fruit. Appropriate peak experiences are the by-products of experiencing Being over a long period of time, and constantly checking to make sure that one is following God's call. This can only be done by learning to be open to novelty and making the most of it. Drug abusers, however, are not interested in novelty, but the same "high" time after time -- which is entropic. They seek a permanent peak experience which they hope will rid them of their existential anxiety. And possibly they succeed when their brains become burned out. But this is a high price to pay in order not to experience existential anxiety. And like all other idols, drugs sooner or later are seen for what they truly are -- a slow death that leads inevitably to entropy.

There are also other inappropriate peak experiences. One that concerns me is the peak experience that our youth get when they play computer games. In an instant they can get a sense of wholeness, well being, and power. Instead of struggling with the anxieties of growing up, they often play these games which are robbing them of the opportunities they have to struggle with their intense existential anxiety. And if they evade this struggle in their adolescence, they may grow up emotionally empty.

While trying to increase the number of inappropriate peak experiences that one can have, one must experience Non-Being. But Non-Being does not contribute to the future. It robs it of its ability to help us struggle until we have become who we can become. It is not interested in God's call. Non-Being offers us counterfeit money that can never be cashed. Authentic Being, however, is the by-product of growth, risk taking, and following God's call. Peak experiences are those once in a while peaks that give us tremendous pleasure -- yet there is hard work in between them when life is not so pleasant. Only by crossing the valley do we have a right to reach the peak. And God will always present new hills for us to climb. The more hills we have climbed in our lifetime the more worthwhile was our life. Non-Being, however, leaves us at the bottom of the valley, not going anywhere; giving up our opportunities to experience real life, and become who we can become by climbing hills and reaching peaks.

I know of no sure way to increase the number of our peak experiences. Learning to be open to each and every moment and making the most of them are certainly good places to start. The more we experience Being,



the more peak experiences we will have; and the more we will experience the greatness of God, and the still small voice that calls us from where we are to where we are not yet. My thesis is that learning to do this is what life is all about. We can do this only by making the most of whatever novelty is presented to us.

## CHAPTER 6

## APPLICATION OF THE CONCEPT OF BEING

The emphasis here is on discerning God's offer and call forward in every situation.<sup>1</sup>

Previously I have described what process theism is and how by using it as a system of faith we can gain the courage and strength needed to take the risk and respond positively to existential anxiety. Responding positively to existential anxiety entails experiencing Being and I have just finished describing ways of doing that. In this last chapter I will talk about activities I have found in the local church that have assisted me in experiencing Being the most -- after I understood process theism and had the concept of Being under my belt. Out of the four ways listed it is hoped that the reader will find at least one to help him or her experience Being and thereby respond positively to existential anxiety. But the list is not meant to be exhaustive. Any activity that adequately discerns God's offer and call forward would suffice. Utilizing process theism as a system of faith should allow one to fully participate in that activity.

That is the one criterion of any application of the concept of Being: it must accurately discern God's offer and call forward in each

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<sup>1</sup>John B. Cobb, Jr., Theology and Pastoral Care (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), p. 55.

and every situation. This must be done mostly on an individual level, but groups of individuals can still gather and benefit from the observations and feedback of others. The ultimate decision of what is and what is not God's call forward, however, must be made on an individual level -- and then one may still decide not to follow God's call but yield to entropy instead by experiencing Non-Being.

What is discussed in the following pages are ways that we can experience Being by applying the concept of Being in specific activities. By applying the concept of Being I do not necessarily mean using a certain formula in order to obtain a certain desired effect, but rather being involved in a certain type of activity in which God's offer and call forward are more easily discerned. In other words, by doing these things one has a higher chance of discerning God's call forward, but there is no guarantee that this will happen. The list of activities is not meant to be inclusive. It only offers some examples.

#### A. SOCIAL CONCERNS

Mother Teresa, who founded the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta, and who is widely recognized as a contemporary saint once wrote of doing good for others:

There is no limit, because God is love and love is God, and so you are really in love with God. And then, God's love is infinite. But part is to love and to give until it hurts. And that's why it's not how much you do, but how much love you put into action. How much love we put into our presents. That's why people -- maybe they are rich people -- who have not got a capacity to give and to receive

love are the poorest of the poor. And I think this is what our Sisters have got -- the spreading of joy that you see in many religious people who have given themselves without reserve to God.<sup>2</sup>

Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity have taken the ultimate leap of faith and have risked all by giving up everything that they owned so that they could be helpers to the sick and dying in India. Certainly this must not be an easy task or one that many of us would personally want to undertake. Yet there is something here that all of us can be involved in, and that is being socially concerned about others and doing something concrete about that concern.

Mother Teresa says that what matters in giving is the amount of love that we put into action. And when we give love to someone else through any type of social action -- by putting our love into action -- we give away part of who we are. This allows God to fill the void that is left, because God can only fill an empty vessel. Those who do not know how to give love -- often the materialistically rich -- find themselves empty inside because God does not dwell in them and because they consider themselves already full and not in need of God. If God does not dwell in a person, then it is very hard for that person to be open to God's call because that person has his or her mind focused on something else.

But people like the Missionaries of Charity have given themselves without reserve to God and are making a lifetime effort of helping others who somehow seem to be poorer than themselves. Mother Teresa says that

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<sup>2</sup>Mother Teresa of Calcutta, A Gift For God (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1975), pp 67-68.

they give love till it hurts. Only in this way can they overcome pre-occupation with themselves in order to be open to the limitless love of God which flows in and fills them up so fully. In this respect they are rich in spirit. And those who are rich in spirit have no trouble in being open to God's offer and call forward. The person, however, who makes an idol out of possessions is as closed to God as one can get and therefore is not able to listen when God calls or introduces novelty into the world. The rise and fall of gold prices for example are much more important to this type of person. Howard Hughes was one such person. He established an empire of material possessions and only cared about the things that would allow him to accumulate more wealth. But he was very poor in spirit, and died unhappy.

Both Mother Teresa and Howard Hughes are extreme cases. Yet every single one of us fits in somewhere between. Few of us have given everything we have to the poor and then joined a group to help the poor for the rest of our lives. And few of us have forgotten about all social concerns and anything else worthwhile just so that we could worship our possessions and amass a fortune. Yet, in our inner thoughts how close have we actually come to dreaming about being one or the other? And we know that with a lot of effort maybe we could even be one or the other.

But in our everyday existence we try to do the best we can and forget about that which we are unable to do. Yet God still calls us forward to make the most of the moment and to do the best we can to make this a better planet for all to live on. And those who are most open

and respond to God's call in this area are also prone to be open to God's call in other areas. That is why the extreme examples work so well. Mother Teresa is a living saint strictly because she responds to God's call. She makes the most of not only her moments, but also of her entire life. There is no better way to live, and it is obvious that she has the love of God in her, which no one or no situation will ever be able to take away. We can all come closer to her example if we learn how to be more open to God and socially concerned about the world we live in and the people who are our neighbors, so that we put "love into action".

Howard Hughes is also a good example because he portrays just the opposite. He was a person with his mind on earthly things and, therefore he could not be labeled a saint. He did not respond to God's call in his life because his ear was up next to the ticker tape listening to the latest stock market prices. He never made the most of his moments in a way that really mattered. Certainly he beat out others in getting a good deal on buying an airline, and he knew when to sell or to buy stock; yet God had nothing to do with these things. But when the general public learned how he spent the last years of his life, they wondered if there was any worse way to spend one's fleeting existence. The peace of God was not in him and it is sadly clear that he was not happy.

There are numerous ways to be involved in social concerns not only in one's own specific community, but also in the world as a whole. Both migrant workers in the United States and the people who get paid just as poorly to pick our coffee beans in Latin America are in our

domain of responsibility. The world's hunger and the high level of unemployment of our young black males are relevant too. Doing things for the church helps. It is important to become aware of the issues so that when the right time comes we can make the best choice and do the right thing. (Any clergyperson would have many other ideas and suggestions.) But above all, one must have the right attitude. As Mother Teresa said, "it's not how much you do, but how much love you put into action".<sup>3</sup>

There's no guarantee that if one is involved in social concerns one will experience Being. Yet at the same time it would be hard not to. I think that if we are open to God's call and risk following Him in this one area, then we will be open in other areas also. If nothing else, we will have the love of God within us, and that always keeps us open to novelty and what God wants of us next.

#### B. SPIRITUAL LIFE GROUPS

By a spiritual life group I mean a group that is formed by average people, usually with a leader or facilitator. It is composed of people who have the expressed intent of bettering their "spiritual lives". The group would probably meet on Sunday morning in a church, but it might work better in an informal setting in a home.

The group can be made up of older adolescents and of adults of all ages. No experience is usually required although those who have

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

previously participated in such groups usually have an easier time with the process. The group should not turn itself away from the world and no longer be involved in the world. Rather the opposite should happen as a result of having one's spiritual life re-evaluated. One should discover that a true spirituality revolves around good fruits.

The emphasis of these types of groups is not on commandments that God has given us once and for all. Instead the members need to be open to the opportunities that become fresh in each and every moment. Legalism thus fades away as God's call forward is listened to and then responded to. One becomes interested in the present moment and what God is saying in it so that one can make the most of that moment by following God's lead and thereby capitalize on the opportunity that is before one. Each moment presents one with a fresh opportunity.

Spiritual life groups need to do more than lead to good works by way of a sense of duty. They need to help us learn how to be more immediately sensitive to God's creativity and to what God asks for in each moment. One needs not only to go the extra mile, but also to find out what else one can do and then to maximize the opportunity.<sup>4</sup>

There are many groups that can enrich one's "spiritual life" utilizing the guidelines above and the one criterion mentioned at the beginning of this chapter in the preface. The ability of the group to do these things depends upon the quality and skills of the leader; the

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<sup>4</sup>These guidelines were adapted from Cobb, pp 53-55.



size, age, interest level, and abilities of the group; the material covered by the group, its duration; and also the location of the group meeting. One group might also not be that successful one time and then be more successful the next time. Attitudes have a lot to do with it.

But some churches do offer these types of groups from time to time and the people who participate do grow in their spiritual lives. The groups are not necessarily centered in any one area, such as bible study/dialogue, guided imagery or discussion on a certain topic; but these are all appropriate areas. Perhaps there are others that can be easily added, but these are ones I have either participated in or led.

Some of us have shared in one of these groups at least once in our lives. And in these groups we probably learned something new about God that made us stop and think. At this point our old perception was torn down and a new offer was made that called us forward to something new. Novelty was introduced and we had the opportunity to capitalize on it. We could also shun it if we wished. But someone there told us something new that made us stop and think. If we discerned that God was somewhere in the midst of this revelation, though it may or may not have come from God directly, then we were lured to change in accordance with that new information. The better our spiritual life group, then the more calls we received and the more intense they were.

My point is that it is in such groups that these calls are so often made by God. And this is not by accident, because in such groups we usually try to be open to the will of God, and through digesting the

material and listening to the leader and other participants we are able to hear God more clearly than we would if we were, for example, watching television. We learn how to listen to God as a by-product when we enrich our spiritual lives. And the more we enrich our spiritual lives, the more this by-product will be manifest. The more spiritual life groups we attend, the higher the probability that this will occur; though of course there is no guarantee.

### C. WORSHIP SERVICES

There is probably no better place to hear God's call forward than in a worship service. The worship service can be traditional, or it can be a special service to celebrate a special event or special time of the year. If there is a sermon of some sort, certainly this should be a time when a personal message is being extended to us in such a way that we feel some impact from what we have heard and may want to do something about it.

The hymns that we sing often have special meaning, and often God calls us through our understanding of a specific hymn. The pastoral prayer opens us up to the world around us, both in our community and in the world abroad. Our giving money to the church opens us up to others around us and the institution of the church itself. And the choir singing usually gives us a certain pleasant feeling. But no matter what type of worship service we attend, or which part we enjoy the most, God has a good opportunity to speak to us -- especially in worship services that provide something new we have not thought of.

Simply defined, Christian Worship is words and actions that occur in a specific time and place in the midst of a living breathing congregation.<sup>5</sup> But as I've pointed out, there needs to be much more to it -- there needs to be a call from God. At a much deeper level, then, Christian worship also challenges human righteousness and points to the day when all achievements and actions will be judged, yet it offers hope and promise by affirming that ultimately, all rests in God's hands.<sup>6</sup> So a worship service should consist of both judgement of where we are, and hope as to where we can be. It is a never ending process that keeps us open to what God is calling us to be here at this moment. And there is no final place that we end up, because in every worship service, year after year, we still hear judgement on where we are and the call to what we can be.

It would be difficult to go to a year of worship services and not feel that we have been both praised for how far we have come in our personal life's journey, and also judged for what we have not been able to do -- or else called to respond to something new in either our lives or the world that requires a response on our part.

But one thing is sure: we will be called by God to risk who we are by overcoming our existential anxiety and attempting to become who we can become if we attend worship services enough. We cannot help but

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<sup>5</sup>James F. White, Introduction to Christian Worship (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), p. 22.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

hear some type of judgement. Some people would rightly say that we hear too much judgement but even this makes us see that we still have a way to go in our personal journey as pilgrims following God's will for our lives. This feeling of nakedness before God allows us to see our need to be clothed by God and not to rely on our possessions, talents, and skills to make us happy in our lives. As John Cobb once put it, "above all the spiritual life can be healthy only as it is grounded in the assurance of an acceptance that no human being can give, the ultimate acceptance that is God's".<sup>7</sup>

In a worship service we are looking for acceptance from God and also to praise God for what God has done and hopefully will do. But in praising God we must listen for a reply. And hopefully when we hear a reply that makes us feel naked, we will still want the ultimate acceptance that is only God's to give. Then we have no choice but to listen to the judgement as to where our lives now are.

But the judgement must also point a way out, a call forward, a new offer for our lives that will take us where we are and lead us to where we are not yet. This is where the hope comes in, and any good worship service must have at least a ray of hope for those who participate in it. There must be a way offered to us and this can be pointed out in hymns, prayer, the sermon, etc.

If one goes to a worship service, one should above all else hear two things: God judges us where we are, but God also opens up a

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<sup>7</sup> Cobb, p. 17.

way to make the future better for us and those around us. We may or may not be able to bring the Kingdom of God, but the way is further opened for us. It is up to us to make the most of the opportunities that God gives to us and then to leave the rest to God.

Those people who go to worship services certainly do not always experience Being. Yet even as thick as our insulation is -- some built in and some added -- God still manages to get through during some worship services, and lets us know that there is more that needs to be done with our lives. We do not have to listen and certainly some worship services are better than others in helping us to hear the call of judgement and hope;<sup>8</sup> yet sooner or later the message will get through and we will be forced to do something about what we hear, or else ignore God.

Those who respond to the call and take the risk are much more likely to experience Being than those who do not respond positively, but turn away from the call because of their pride, idolatry, sloth or resistance to change. This is the way to entropy. But those who do respond positively, who make the most of the occasion, who participate fully in the occasion, and overcome their existential anxiety, find growth, novelty, a sense of awe and wonder; and life itself.

#### D. PRIVATE PRAYER

The last way I am going to talk about applying the concept of Being is in private prayer. While private prayer has a different meaning

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<sup>8</sup>We can improve worship services by increasing the amount of novelty presented in them, and by helping people to incorporate that which is being presented to them.

for each of us, it can be defined most simply as time spent along with God in a contemplative manner. It is sort of a one on one dialogue in which we do most of all of the speaking, yet both sides do the listening.

One way to talk about private prayer is to describe steps that some people need to go through in order for their prayer to be effective. I am not saying that these steps must be followed, but I have discovered that using them has enriched my prayer life significantly.

The first step of my private prayer is to have an adoration or psalm that describes the greatness and goodness of God. Psalms 1, 19, 24, 33, 92, 98, 100, 103, 111, 150, and others may be good to use. We start off this way in order to gain the correct perspective on the world. God comes first in our lives, and it is to God that we need first of all to give homage. After ten minutes of this we will often discover that we already have a new perspective on the world and our place within it.

The next step which I find helpful is confession. Confession helps to clear up the walls and blocks that we have placed between ourselves and God. It is not that God does not know about what we are confessing. We are acknowledging to God what God already knows. Certain prayers might center on this step and make this the major emphasis, or if we have already cleared the air between God and ourselves, we might pass over this step. Some of the things we might want to confess are: our need to grow, our being estranged from God or others, our feeling of being out of sync with the world, our violation of someone's feelings or rights whether they are our neighbors or in a different nation, feelings of guilt or hatred, or our lack of ability to love those around

us. The confession can be written out at this point, or it can be thought out. But the areas of confession need to correspond to the question, "Where is my life not in the will of God?" Receiving God's forgiveness must be an integral part of every confession.

The third step I find helpful is petition. It sometimes seems hard to ask God for things, yet Jesus said ask and you will receive (Luke 11:10). We should not ask for frivolous things, but for the things that we really want from the bottom of our hearts. God certainly knows that we need certain things, but it helps to bring these up and ask earnestly for them. But we should add at the end of every request, "If this is your will". Sometimes we may ask for something that is not in our best interest. God knows this, and it is important to give God final control over whether we should receive something or not.

The fourth helpful step of private prayer can be intercession for others. It helps to pray for others. Some research has been done in this area, and it seems that praying for someone who is ill or who is going through a difficult time can help as long as one has a picture of the person being healthy again or overcoming the difficulty. There are different theories about how this type of prayer could help another person: ESP, thought waves, power from the Holy Spirit, etc. But I don't think that the theories are important. What is important is that we can pray to God to help someone who is going through a rough time in life right now and it can help.

The last thing we need to keep in mind during private prayer is that we need to leave spaces or gaps in the process just to contemplate

and to listen to what comes up from within us. We would spoil a lot of the benefits if we rushed right through the whole process and were not open to the Spirit of God working in us and through our efforts. There needs to be a quiet time with just God and ourselves involved. And if we give it half a chance, we will greatly benefit.<sup>9</sup>

Just because we pray privately to God does not guarantee that we will experience Being. Yet I do not see how we could pray privately over a period of time and not hear God's call beckoning us forward at some point or another. The call may not be very powerful, and it may concern only a small thing in our lives, but if we learn to listen to the small things, pretty soon a whole river will open up to us and we will be bombarded by what God would have us do. To answer a call such as this involves risking and all the guts we can muster. Yet to do so means living life at its fullest, making the most of all of its pains and joys.

So, we can learn ways that will enable us to experience Being more often. We want to do this because it prevents us from experiencing Non-Being and eventually entropy; and also because it keeps us open to novelty, which is life itself.

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<sup>9</sup>A special thanks to Martha Rowlett-Arnott for her help with this section.



## CHAPTER 7

### SUMMARY

I have demonstrated with the help of various scholars that existential anxiety exists. Not only does it exist somewhere out in the world, but its effects are felt at the very core of our being. Existential anxiety comes out of the tension produced by our living in subjective and objective realities. But the consequence of this division need not be bad. Out of existential anxiety come both creativity and sin.

Unfortunately, most people turn to Non-Being through pride, idolatry, or sloth in response to existential anxiety. This, as I have shown, is harmful, because it closes the self to novelty and pushes it toward entropy. This is hell, and we can look at an alcoholic living on skid row as an example.

Responding to existential anxiety is no easy task. Often even death itself can be thought to be less painful. The task of the clergy-person is to show the way of openness to novelty, and thereby overcome existential anxiety. Process theism gives a system of faith to those who are willing to take the risk inherent in overcoming existential anxiety. Ultimately, however, it requires a leap of faith from the known to the unknown. Applying the concepts I have set forth can make that easier.

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